



The Politics of English Nationhood

Michael Kenny

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Winner of the Political Studies Association WJM MacKenzie Prize for best book of 2014

The Politics of English Nationhood supplies the first comprehensive overview of the evidence, research and major arguments relating to the revival of Englishness, exploring its varied, and often overlooked, political ramifications and dimensions. It examines the difficulties which the major political parties have encountered in dealing with 'the English question' against the backdrop of the diminishing hold of established ideas of British government and national identity in the final years of the last century. And it explores a range of factors—including insecurities generated by economic change, Euroscepticism, and a growing sense of cultural anxiety — which helped make the renewal of Englishness appealing and imperative, prior to the introduction of devolution by the first Blair government, a policy which also gave this process a further impetus.

The book therefore provides a powerful challenge to the two established orthodoxies in this area. These either maintain that the English are dispositionally unable to assert their own nationhood outside the framework of the British state, or point to the supposed resurgence of a resentful and reactive sense of English nationalism. This volume instead demonstrates that a renewed, resonant and internally divided sense of English nationhood is apparent across the lines of class, geography, age, and ethnicity. And it identifies several distinct strands of national identity that have emerged in this period, contrasting the appearance of populist and resentful forms of English nationalism with an embedded and deeply rooted sense of conservative Englishness and attempts to reconstruct a more liberal and civic idea of a multicultural England. This volume also includes a wide-ranging analysis of the culturally rooted revival of Englishness, drawing out the political dimensions and implications of this re-emerging form of national consciousness.

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